



KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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TWO BUSINESS LEADERS RECEIVE JOSEPH W. KELLY AWARD

(FRANKFORT, Ky.) – At its meeting today, the Kentucky Board of Education presented the 16th annual Joseph W. Kelly Award to two business leaders who are actively engaged in making a difference in their local schools: Brent Cooper, president of C-Forward Information Technologies of Covington, and Audwin Helton, president and chief executive officer of Spatial Data Integrations Inc. of Louisville.

“Kentucky is fortunate to have the involvement of the business community in P-12 public education,” Kentucky Board of Education Chair Bill Twyman said. “The support provided, as evidenced by these two individuals, is invaluable in helping Kentucky reach its educational goals.”

The Kelly award is given to businesspeople who offer outstanding leadership and service toward promoting school improvement and equitable educational opportunities for all Kentucky children.

In a letter nominating Cooper, Boone County Superintendent Randy Poe noted Cooper’s commitment to education as a driver of economic development. “Brent believes an education system that prepares the next generation to become its workforce is the single biggest economic development tool a region can have,” Poe wrote.

Northern Kentucky Education Council (NKYEC) Executive Director Polly Page stated, “Brent understands the interplay between business and education. From the very beginning, he has served as a liaison between the business community and education and understands how that relates to policy and funding.” Cooper has been an NKYEC board member since the inception of the council.

As a member of the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce board of directors, Cooper chairs the Education and Workforce Committee. He also serves as co-chair of the Greater Cincinnati Read On! campaign and as a math tutor for the Fort Thomas Independent schools. His company has a business engagement partnership with the Covington Independent schools’ James E. Biggs Early Childhood Education Center and participates in an Adopt-A-Class Foundation mentoring program with John G. Carlisle Elementary School. He also helps organize business engagement tours conducted in Boone County schools and other northern Kentucky schools.

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In a letter nominating Helton, Jefferson County Public Education Foundation (JCPEF) Executive Director Sam Corbett noted Helton's tireless efforts to improve public education. "For many years, he has contributed outstanding leadership and service toward promoting school improvement and equity of education opportunity for all Kentucky children," Corbett wrote. "It is staggering how the efforts of one person can truly make a difference in the lives of so many students."

Helton has served on the JCPEF board since 1997 and contributed time, expertise and resources to the Jefferson County schools for many years. He serves on the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce Business Leader Champions for Education group, which supports educators and students who are working to improve Kentucky's schools. In addition, he sponsors the Audwin & Rae Helton Award, which recognizes a member of the Greater Louisville Alliance of Black School Educators as part of the Hilliard Lyons Teacher Excellence Awards.

Helton served as chairman of a task force recommending changes that led to the development of the 5-Star Schools model in Jefferson County high schools in which schools offer courses in an array of professional career themes and was instrumental in forming geographic information systems career and technical education pathways at five Jefferson County high schools (Central, Doss, Eastern, Fairdale and Jeffersontown). He helped Doss High School establish a Men of Quality mentoring program and other programs impacting minority students, has presented in classrooms throughout Jefferson County and has assisted with freshman report card conferences.

The Kelly Award is given in honor of Joseph W. Kelly, a respected business person and chair of the Kentucky Board of Education from 1991 to 1998. Kelly's efforts and expertise were crucial to the implementation and nurturing of Kentucky's school improvement efforts.

Board members Nawanna Privett, Mary Gwen Wheeler and Grayson Boyd served as the selection committee for the award this year.

Previous Winners of the Joseph W. Kelly Award

2013 Jim Allen, chairman and CEO of Hilliard Lyons

2011 Henry Hunt, chief operating officer for DataSeam

2010 Helen M. Carroll, manager of Community Relations for Toyota Motor Engineering and Manufacturing, North America Inc.

2009 Bud Hudson, CEO of the Pattie A. Clay Regional Medical Center in Richmond

2008 Al Rider, president and CEO of the North Central Education Foundation in Elizabethtown

2007 Ben Cundiff, owner/operator of Cundiff Farms in Cadiz

2006 Henry Vogt Heuser, Jr., CEO and president of Unistar/Vogt in Louisville

2005 Wynn Long Radford III, president and co-owner of Higgins Insurance Agency in Hopkinsville

2004 Ann Yager Hamlin, director of Stith Funeral Home in Danville

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2003 State Senator Jimmy Higdon, owner of Higdon's Foodtown in Lebanon

2002 Frank and Mattie Justice, founders of the Frank and Mattie Justice Charitable Foundation in Pikeville

2001 Billy Harper, president of Harper Industries Inc., in Paducah

2000 Vince and Valorie Tanner, owners of the Beaver Dam McDonald's restaurant

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